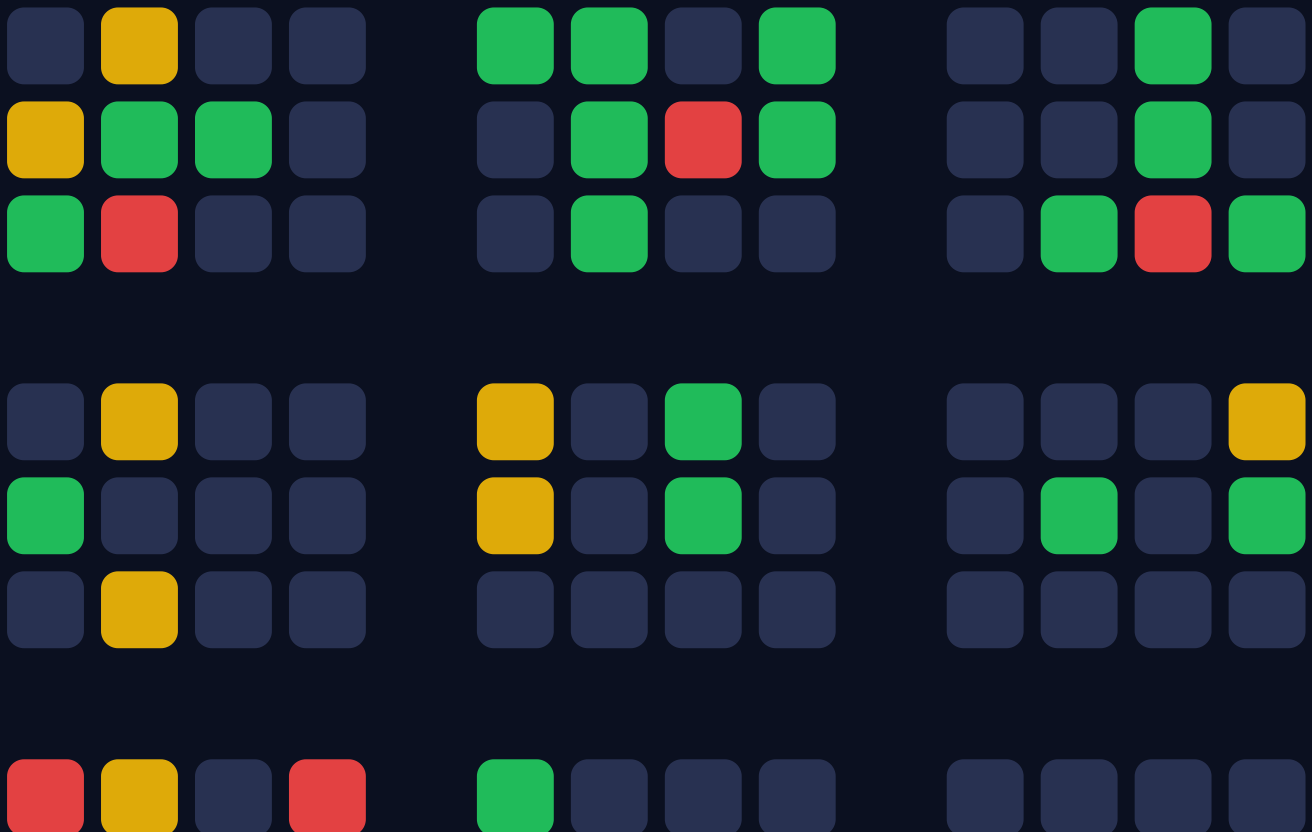




A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR THE WEEKS BEFORE, THE DAYS OF, AND THE WEEKS AFTER THE SHOW

The Exhibitor's Playbook

Turn your next trade show into real pipeline



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Why this guide

A trade show is one of the most expensive weeks in a sales and marketing calendar. Stand space, build, travel, hotels, samples and the time of your best people all add up before a single conversation happens.

Yet most teams prepare the stand for months and the conversations for an afternoon. They walk in hoping the right people will walk by. Some do. Many don't.

This playbook is the opposite approach. It treats the show as a sales campaign with three phases, and gives you the checklists, templates and worksheets to run each one.

Before

Set goals, know exactly who will be on the floor, and book meetings while calendars are still open.

During

Run the stand like a sales floor, qualify every lead and walk the halls with a plan.

After

Follow up within 48 hours, nurture the rest and measure what the show really returned.

How to use it

Read it once end to end, then copy the checklists into your project plan. Every worksheet can be printed and filled in by hand.



The timeline at a glance

Start counting backwards from the day the doors open. The earlier you start, the more of the show you control.

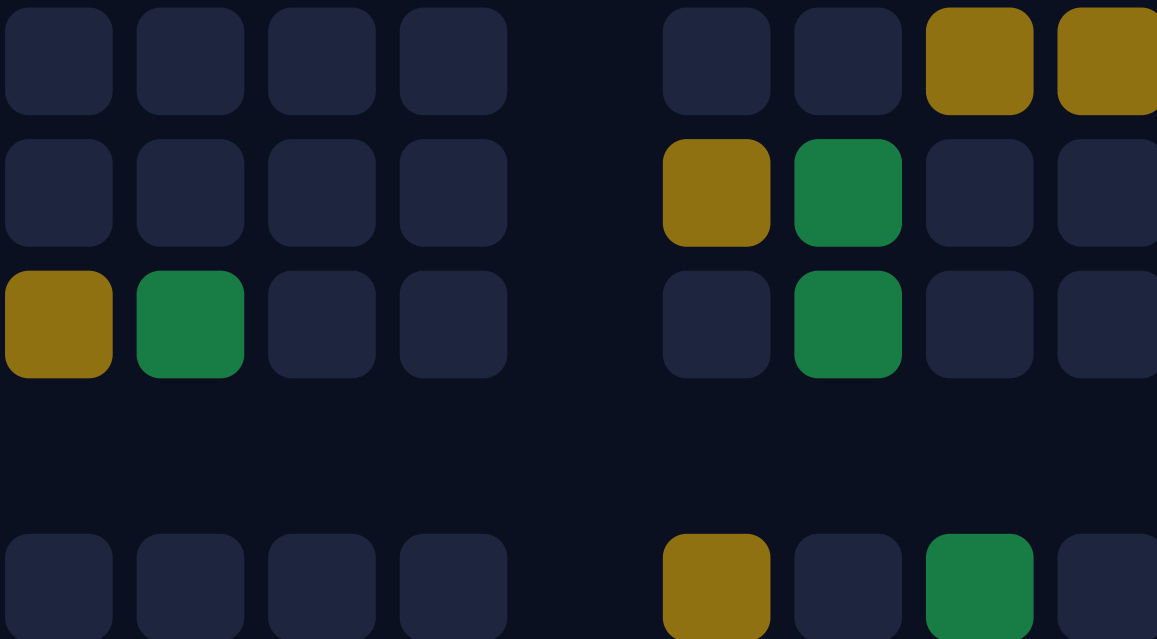
-  **12 to 8 weeks before**
Set goals and budget. Confirm the stand. Choose the team. Get the exhibitor list.
-  **8 to 5 weeks before**
Build and classify your target list. Plan the stand message and the demo.
-  **5 to 2 weeks before**
Run pre-show outreach. Book meetings. Announce your stand on LinkedIn and in email signatures.
-  **Last 2 weeks**
Confirm meetings with stand numbers. Train the team. Print the walking route. Pack.
-  **Show days**
Morning brief, focused conversations, lead capture, evening debrief. Every day.
-  **First 48 hours after**
Personal follow-up to every qualified lead while they still remember you.
-  **Weeks 1 to 6 after**
Nurture, close, measure ROI, write down the lessons for next time.

1

PART 1

Before the show

Most of the result is decided here, weeks before the doors open.



1 Set goals you can measure

"Get leads" is not a goal. A goal has a number, a definition and an owner. Decide them before you spend another euro on the stand.

Goal type	Example target	How you count it
Booked meetings	25 meetings with potential customers	Confirmed in the calendar before the show
Qualified leads	60 A and B leads	Lead card filled in with need, timing and decision role
Partners	5 distributor or reseller talks	Meeting held with a decision maker
Pipeline	Opportunities worth your target value	Entered in the CRM within 7 days
Market intelligence	10 competitor stands reviewed	Notes shared with the team

Tip

Agree with your sales manager what counts as a qualified lead before the show. Otherwise every business card becomes a lead and nothing gets followed up properly.

Your goals for this show

FILL IN

Meetings booked before the show:

Qualified leads (A and B):

Partner conversations:

Pipeline value to create:

Owner of the follow-up:



2

Know who will be on the floor

The exhibitor list is the most valuable document the organizer publishes, and most teams never read it properly. Hundreds of companies that could buy from you, partner with you or compete with you will be a few minutes' walk from your stand.

1

Get the list

Download or copy the official exhibitor directory as soon as it is published. It keeps growing, so check it again 10 days before the show.

2

Classify every exhibitor

Mark each company as a potential customer, a potential partner, a competitor or skip. Write one line on why.

3

Rank the customers

Order your potential customers by fit: size, industry, region and how clearly they need what you sell.

4

Find the right person

For your top targets, identify the person who owns the decision or the budget, not a generic inbox.

5

Put it on the map

Mark the stands on the floor plan by color, so the team sees at a glance where to go.

Green: customers

Companies that could buy from you. Visit first and book meetings.

Yellow: partners

Distributors, integrators and complementary suppliers. Worth a conversation.

Red: competitors

Walk by for intelligence, ideally on the last afternoon.

Time saver

This is exactly the part Exhibited.ai does for you: every exhibitor scored against your website, color coded on the floor plan, with a reason for each.

3 Book meetings before the show

The best meetings at a show are booked before it. Three to five weeks out, your targets still answer email and still have free slots. In show week, they don't.

- Start 5 weeks before the doors open, finish 1 week before.
- Write to one named person per company, not to info@ addresses.
- Mention their stand number. It proves you did your homework.
- Offer a specific, short slot: 15 minutes at your stand or theirs.
- Send one follow-up after 2 working days. Then stop.

Email 1: the meeting request

Subject: stand **their stand** at **show**

Hi **first name**,

I saw that **company** is exhibiting at **show**, stand **their stand**. We help **type of company** with **one concrete result**.

Would 15 minutes on **day** work, at your stand or ours (**your stand**)?

your name

Email 2: the follow-up, 2 working days later

Hi **first name**,

A quick follow-up on **show**. If a meeting at the show is too tight, I'm happy to send a short overview instead so you have it before you fly.

your name

4 Plan a stand that sells

Visitors decide in a few seconds whether to stop. Your stand has to answer three questions from the aisle: what do you do, for whom, and why should I care now.

One message

One sentence, readable from 5 meters. Not your full product list.

One demo

A live demo or a physical sample people can touch.
Movement stops people.

One offer

A reason to talk today: a show price, a free assessment, a sample.

- ☐ Headline readable from the aisle, with your result, not your company history
- ☐ Open front. No table blocking the entrance
- ☐ A quiet corner for booked meetings
- ☐ Lead capture ready: badge scanner, app or printed lead cards
- ☐ Short brochure or QR code to a show landing page
- ☐ Charging, Wi-Fi and a backup for the demo
- ☐ Water, mints and a place to store bags out of sight

5 Prepare the team

Your stand staff are the product people meet. A short training session before the show is worth more than any upgrade to the build.

Role	Job on the stand
Stand lead	Runs the schedule, the daily brief and the debrief
Hosts	Open conversations in the aisle and qualify visitors
Experts	Run the demo and the technical deep dives
Meeting owner	Makes sure every booked meeting starts on time
Floor walker	Visits target stands with the walking route

- Shifts of 2 to 3 hours. Tired people sell badly.
- Everyone can say what you do in one sentence.
- Everyone knows the 4 qualification questions (chapter 7).
- Phones away on the stand. Eat and call away from the stand.
- One shared place for leads, so nothing lives in someone's pocket.

6 Logistics and budget

Small logistics failures cost big money at a show. Use this list 3 weeks before and again the week before.

- ☐ Stand contract, floor plan and deadlines confirmed with the organizer
- ☐ Build, electricity, internet and furniture ordered
- ☐ Shipping of samples and materials booked, with customs papers if needed
- ☐ Flights, hotel and visas for the whole team
- ☐ Badges registered for every team member
- ☐ Brochures, business cards and giveaways printed
- ☐ Lead capture tool tested
- ☐ Insurance for equipment and samples
- ☐ Budget tracked: space, build, travel, marketing, hospitality
- ☐ Emergency kit: tape, cables, chargers, pens, first aid

Budget at a glance

FILL IN

Stand space:

Build and furniture:

Travel and hotels:

Marketing and print:

Hospitality:

Total:

Pre-show marketing in one week

You don't need a big budget to make sure your targets know you'll be there. Do these seven things in the last two weeks.

1

Show page

A short page on your website with your stand number, what you'll show and a form to book a meeting.

2

Email signature

Add "Meet us at {show}, stand {number}" to every signature in the company.

3

LinkedIn posts

Three posts: the announcement, what you'll show, and a reminder the day before.

4

Show hashtag

Use the official hashtag and comment on other exhibitors' posts.

5

Customer email

Invite existing customers. They bring credibility to a busy stand.

6

Organizer listing

Complete your profile in the official directory, with keywords and a clear description.

7

Calendar

Put every booked meeting in a shared calendar with the stand number.

2

PART 2

During the show

Four days, thousands of people, one goal: the right conversations.



7 Working the stand

Most stand conversations die in the first ten seconds, usually with "Can I help you?". Open with a question about them instead.

Opening lines that work

"What brings you to the show this year?"

"Are you here to buy, to sell, or to see what's new?"

"How are you handling **the problem you solve** today?"

"I saw your stand in hall **number**. Are you here as a visitor too?"

Then qualify with four questions. Ask them naturally, not as a form.

Question	What you learn
What are you working on right now?	The need
How do you handle it today?	The current solution and the pain
When would a change make sense?	The timing
Who else would be involved?	The decision process

The 3-minute rule

If a conversation is clearly not a fit after three minutes, end it kindly. Every minute with the wrong visitor is a minute the right one walks past.



Capture and score every lead

A business card without notes is almost worthless a week later. Capture the context while you still have it.

Lead card

FILL IN

Name, company, role:

What they need:

Timing:

Decision role:

Next step agreed:

Score (A, B or C):

Captured by:

A: hot

Clear need, timing within 3 months, decision maker or close to one. Follow up within 24 hours.

B: warm

Real interest, timing later or a different decision maker. Follow up within 48 hours.

C: cold

Information only. Add to your newsletter with permission.

9 Walk the floor with a plan

Your next customer may be exhibiting too. Some of the best deals at a show happen on other companies' stands.

1 Customers first

Visit your green stands on the first morning, when people are fresh and calendars are open.

2 Route by hall

Group targets by hall so you cross the venue once, not five times a day.

3 Partners next

Yellow stands on day two: distributors, integrators and complementary suppliers.

4 Competitors last

Red stands on the last afternoon, when the halls are quiet. Collect brochures and prices.

5 One line each

Before you leave a stand, write one line on what you learned and the next step.

Respect the exhibitor

Exhibitors are there to sell. Ask if it's a good moment, keep it short when they are busy, and come back at a quieter time.

10 The daily rhythm

When	What	Time
Before doors open	Brief: goals for the day, meetings, who covers what	15 min
During the day	Conversations, demos, booked meetings, floor walks	All day
Lunch break	Quick check of leads captured so far	5 min
After closing	Debrief: best leads, what worked, what to change tomorrow	20 min
Evening	Send A-lead follow-ups and post one update on LinkedIn	30 min

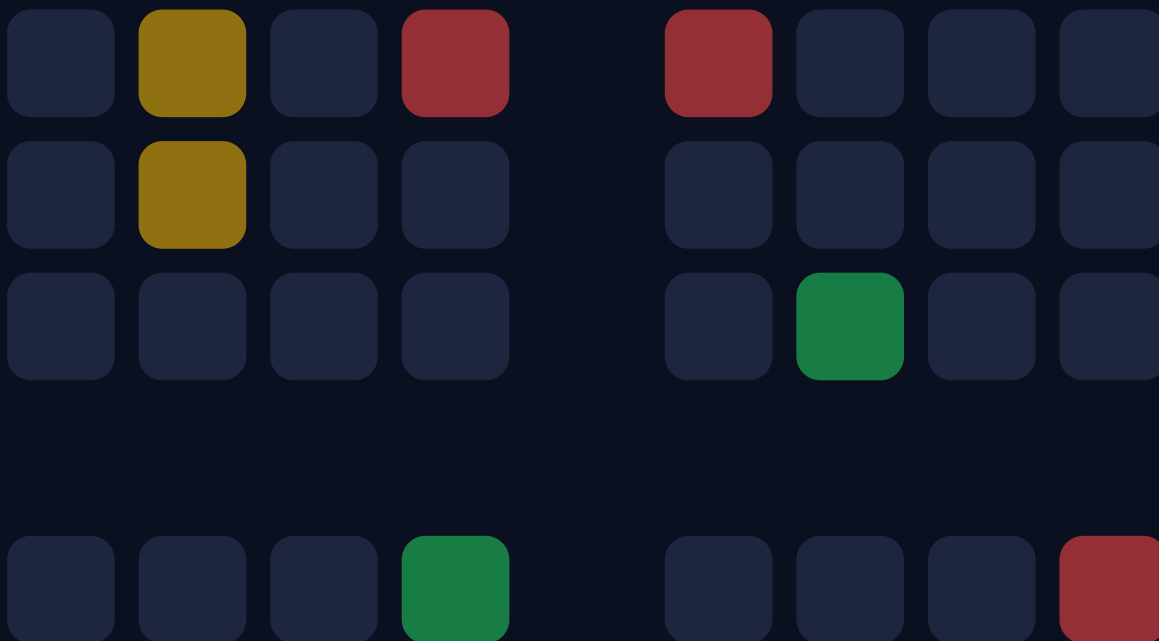
Keep a simple scoreboard on the stand: meetings held, A leads and B leads. Teams that see the numbers chase the numbers.

3

PART 3

After the show

Leads go cold fast. The follow-up is where the money is made.



11

The 48-hour follow-up

Most trade-show leads go cold in the week after the show, while everyone catches up on email. Be the first message they read, and make it personal.

Follow-up to an A or B lead

Subject: our talk at **show**

Hi **first name**,

Good to meet you at stand **your stand** on **day**. You mentioned **their need, in their words**.

As promised, here is **the thing you promised**. Would **two specific times** work for a 20-minute call to go through it?

your name

Follow-up to someone you met on their stand

Hi **first name**,

Thanks for the time at your stand at **show**. I've been thinking about **what they said**.

We help **similar companies** with **result**. Worth a short call next week?

your name

- A leads within 24 hours, B leads within 48 hours.
- Refer to something specific from the conversation.
- One clear next step with a date.

12 Nurture and close

Not every lead is ready to buy now. A simple cadence keeps you in mind without being a nuisance.

- **Day 1 to 2**
Personal follow-up with what you promised.
- **Day 7**
Useful content: a case, a guide or a short video related to their need.
- **Day 14**
A direct question about the next step.
- **Day 30**
Check in, and invite them to the next show or webinar.

Close the loop

Every lead ends in one of three places: an opportunity in the CRM, a nurture list, or closed with a reason. Nothing stays in a spreadsheet on someone's laptop.

13 Measure what the show returned

Measure the show the same way you would measure any campaign, and decide on the next one with numbers, not feelings.

Cost per meeting

Total show cost ÷ meetings held

Cost per qualified lead

Total show cost ÷ A and B leads

Pipeline created

Value of opportunities that came from the show

Return on investment

(Revenue won – total cost) ÷ total cost

Your results

FILL IN

Total cost:

Meetings held:

A and B leads:

Pipeline created:

Revenue won after 6 months:

Return on investment:

14 Lessons for next time

Hold a 30-minute debrief within two weeks, while it's fresh.
Write the answers down and attach them to next year's plan.

Debrief

FILL IN

What brought the best leads?

What should we stop doing?

Which stands or partners surprised us?

Was the stand position right?

Do we come back next year? Why?

The one-page master checklist

- ☐ Goals set with numbers and an owner
- ☐ Exhibitor list classified: customers, partners, competitors, skip
- ☐ Named contact for every top target
- ☐ Pre-show emails sent 5 to 1 weeks before
- ☐ Meetings in a shared calendar with stand numbers
- ☐ Stand message, demo and show offer ready
- ☐ Team trained on opening lines and the 4 questions
- ☐ Lead capture tested
- ☐ Walking route printed, by hall
- ☐ Daily brief and debrief scheduled
- ☐ A leads followed up within 24 hours, B within 48
- ☐ Nurture cadence set for day 7, 14 and 30
- ☐ ROI measured and lessons written down



How Exhibited.ai helps

Chapter 2 is the slowest part of show preparation, and the one most teams skip. We do it for you.

1

Send us two links

Your website and the show's exhibitor list.

2

We score every exhibitor

Each company is classified against what you sell: potential customer, partner, competitor or skip, with a one-line reason.

3

You get the map

A color-coded floor map, the full exhibitor Excel and your top targets, by email within 48 hours.

Basic

Exhibitor spreadsheet and color-coded map. From 9.99 per show.

Starter

Adds company news and an opening line for each target.

Full

Adds decision-maker research for your customer and partner targets.

Try it on your next show

Write to tom@exhibitedai.com with your website and the show, and we'll send you the first 10 booths of your map, free.





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